



Criminals, Lunatics and Witches: Finding the Less Than Pleasant in Family History

Craig L. Foster AG®

Criminals

The largest portion of the known criminal population were the common sneak thieves which included burglars, pickpockets and other types of thieves. Those involved in more violent crimes such as assault, battery, violent theft, highway robbery, manslaughter, murder, rape and other sexual offenses were fewer in number.

Henry Mayhew, et al., *The London Underworld in the Victorian Period* (Minealoe, New York: Dover Publications, 2005), 109.

In 1857, at least 8,600 prostitutes were known to London authorities. Incredibly, that was just a small portion of the estimated prostitutes in London. While London had the most prostitutes, there were ladies of ill-repute in every industrial centre and most market towns.

Henry Mayhew, et al., *The London Underworld in the Victorian Period* (Minealoe, New York: Dover Publications, 2005), 6.

Lists/records of “disorderly women” are found at:

- The National Archives at Kew
- Bristol Archives
- Dorset History Centre
- Gloucestershire Archives
- Plymouth & West Devon Records
- As well as many other repositories

Children also served time in prison. For example, in Dublin, Ireland alone, between 1859 and 1891, 12,671 children between ages seven and sixteen were imprisoned. Prison registers are found at the National Archives of Ireland.

Aoife O’Conner, “Child Prisoners,” *Irish Lives Remembered* 36 (Spring 2017), [n.p.]

Online Sources for Searching for Criminals:

Ancestry

- Birmingham, England, Calendars of Prisoners, 1854-1904
- Cornwall, England, Bodmin Gaol, 1821-1899
- Dorset, England, Calendar of Prisoners, 1854-1904
- England & Wales, Criminal Registers, 1791-1892
- London, England, King’s Bench and Fleet Prison Discharge Books and Prisoner Lists, 1734-1862
- Surrey, England, Calendar of Prisoners, 1880-1891, 1906-1913
- United Kingdom, Licenses of Parole for Female Convicts, 1853-1871, 1883-1887

FamilySearch

Ireland Prison Registers, 1790-1924

findmypast

Britain, Newgate Prison Calendar, vols. 1-2, 1780-1841

City of York Calendars of Prisoners, 1739-1851

Devon, Plymouth Prison Records, 1832-1919

England & Wales, Crime, Prisons and Punishment, 1770-1935

Irish Prison Registers, 1790-1924

Manchester Prison Registers, 1847-1881

Scotland Prison Registers Index, 1828-1884

Other Websites

List of Executions at England's Newgate Prison

http://members.tripod.com/~Data_Mate/Execut.txt

London Lives, 1690 to 1800

<https://www.londonlives.org/>

The Proceedings of the Old Bailey – London's Central Criminal Court, 1674-1913

<https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/index.jsp>

Lunatics

“Due, perhaps, to the absence of a centralised state response to the social problem of madness until the 19th century, private madhouses proliferated in 18th century Britain on a scale unseen elsewhere. References to such institutions are limited for the 17th century but it is evident that by the start of the 18th century, the so-called 'trade in lunacy' was well established.”

By 1807, London and environs had seventeen “madhouses.”

“History of psychiatric institutions,” Wikipedia,

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_psychiatric_institutions.

Online Sources for Searching for Criminals:

Ancestry

England & Wales, Criminal Lunacy Warrant and Entry Books, 1882-1898

England, Criminal Lunatic Asylum Registers, 1820-1843

UK, Lunacy Patients Admission Registers, 1846-1912

Find My Past

Kent, Bexley Asylum Minute Books, 1901-1939

Prestwich Asylum Admissions, 1851-1901

South Yorkshire Asylum, Admission Records, 1872-1910

Other Sources

Ancestors in lunatic asylums

www.whodoyouthinkyouaremagazine.com/tutorials/miscellaneous/ancestors-lunatic-asylums

Remembering Mrs. Rochester, Historical mental health records online

<https://rememberingmrsrochester.wordpress.com/2015/01/31/historical-mental-health-records-online/>

Witchcraft

“The great age of witch hunts in Europe and America spanned roughly 1400 to 1775.”

“From Russia to Bermuda, from Scotland to Brazil, witch hunts took place throughout the world.”

Emerson W. Baker, “The Salem Witch Trials [infographic],” Oxford University Press, 2014,
<https://blog.oup.com/2014/10/salem-witch-trials-infographic/>

Between 1400 and 1775, “100,000 people were prosecuted for witchcraft and at least 50,000 people were sentenced to death.”

Emerson W. Baker, “The Salem Witch Trials [infographic],” Oxford University Press, 2014,
<https://blog.oup.com/2014/10/salem-witch-trials-infographic/>

One of the most active centres of witch-hunting was Scotland, where perhaps 4,000 people were consigned to the flames – a striking number for such a small country, and more than double the execution rate in England. The ferocity of these persecutions can be attributed to the most notorious royal witch-hunter: King James VI of Scotland, who in 1603 became James I of England.

Ellie Cawthorne, “James VI and I: the king who hunted witches,” History Extra, 1 October 2013,
<http://www.historyextra.com/article/premium/james-vi-and-i-king-who-hunted-witches-0>

In fact, in 1597 James I was the only monarch in history to publish a book on witchcraft. *Daemonologie* (literally, the science of demons) was “intended to convince the doubters of the existence of witchcraft – it was also to inspire those who persecuted witches to do so with new vigour and determination.”

Ellie Cawthorne, “James VI and I: the king who hunted witches,” History Extra, 1 October 2013,
<http://www.historyextra.com/article/premium/james-vi-and-i-king-who-hunted-witches-0>

The Pendle witches of 1612 caused a sensation in Lancashire and was one of the more famous of the English witch trials. Ultimately two men and eight women were hanged as witches.

Emma Mason, “Witches in the dock: 10 of Britain’s most infamous witch trials,” History Extra, 1 December <http://www.historyextra.com/feature/witches-dock-witch-trials-10-britains-most-infamous>

British emigrants brought witchcraft superstitions with them that encouraged witch hysteria producing the Salem and hundreds of other witch trials throughout New England.

As late as 1717, four English women were put to death for witchcraft. They were Misses Clark, Clark, Norton & Norton, all of Leicester.

The last witchcraft trial in England was in 1944. Rebecca Jane Yorke was “an English medium who was the last person convicted under the Witchcraft Act 1735.” She was arrested in 1944 for defrauding people who attended her séances. She was found guilty on seven counts against the Witchcraft Act but was fined only £5 and she promised she would hold no more séances.

Tom Gleeson, “Wicked, Wicked Witchcraft,” *Justice of the Peace* (27 September 2008), np.

Gwen Ellis was the first “witch” to be executed in Wales. She lived in Caernarvonshire and was executed in 1594. She was one of only about thirty-four or so prosecution for witchcraft in Wales.

Emma Mason, “Witches in the dock: 10 of Britain’s most infamous witch trials,” History Extra, 1 December
<http://www.historyextra.com/feature/witches-dock-witch-trials-10-britains-most-infamous>

Ireland did not have the high level of witch hunts that Scotland and England had. The last witch trial in Ireland was probably the most prominent one. Eight women were charged in County Antrim in March 1711 of demonic possession of a teenage girl’s body, mind and spirit. They were found guilty and placed first in stocks where they were subjected to stones and rotten fruit by a large crowd. They were then taken to prison where they spent a year before being released.

“Over 300 years ago Ireland’s last witch trial condemned 8 innocent women,” *Irish Central*, 2 April 2017,
<https://www.irishcentral.com/roots/irish-witch-trials-of-eight-women-revealed-300-years-later-123186248-237788431>

On 15 March 1895, Bridget Cleary of Clonmel, Tipperary, Ireland became “the last witch burned in Ireland.” The 28-year-old woman was burned to death by her husband and family members because they believed she was possessed by a fairy.

Her murder became a part of Irish folklore. It is said there is a children’s rhyme, “Are you a witch or are you a fairy? Or are you the wife of Michael Cleary?”

“Bridget Cleary ‘the last witch burned in Ireland,’” *Irish Central*, 7 June 2017,
<https://www.irishcentral.com/roots/history/bridget-cleary-the-last-witch-burned-in-ireland>

Sources for search for Witchcraft and Witch Hunts:

National Records of Scotland

| | | |
|------------|--|-----------|
| AD14/12/17 | Precognition against Robert Murray for the crime of witchcraft | 1812 |
| AD14/22/71 | Precognition against Isabella Whitefield for the crime of witchcraft | 1822 |
| GD1/315 | Papers relating to witchcraft in Inverkip and contract for the parsonage teinds of the parish of Kilpatrick | 1642-1662 |
| JC40 | Witchcraft Papers | 1572-1709 |
| RH15/14/11 | Note of information whereby to raise criminal letters before Justice General [at instance of Thomas Stewart of Ryland] against George Fraiser in Outlaw [Oathlaw] and Geilles Chalmer, his spouse, who sought help from deceased John Philp, a damned warlock, who was burned in Banff, [1633-1634] 23 February 1631, for witchcraft | |

The National Archives (UK)

| | | |
|-------------------|--|------|
| Ref. Q/SB/2/13 | Depositions | 1651 |
| Ref. Ep/1/11/1 | Deposition Books | 1571 |
| Ref. EP/13/1 | New Castle St. Andrew’s Parish Records | |
| | Includes list of witches executed on the Town Moor | 1650 |
| Ref. RYE/43/138/7 | Order of the Mayor of Rye | 1645 |
| Ref. HAS/1667W/51 | Records of the High Sheriff, Assizes | 1667 |

Online Sources for search for Witchcraft and Witch Hunts

Ancestry

All Scotland, Names of Witches, 1658

New England, Salem Witches and Others Tried for Witchcraft, 1647-1697

Other Websites

81 Scottish "Witches" Pardoned [includes list of the 81 executed people

http://forejustice.org/wc/sp/scottish_pardons.html

The Pendle Witches

www.pendlewitches.co.uk

What does all of this mean?

- We can't pick our ancestors.
- We are not responsible for what our ancestors did.
- Many of these ancestors were actually good people.
- We can discover good, helpful clues about our ancestors.

For Further Reading

Allan, Annemarie. *81 Witches of Prestonpans*. Prestoungrange, Scotland: Prestoungrange University Press, 2005.

"Ancestors in lunatic asylums." *Who Do You Think You Are?* 2012.

<http://www.whodoyouthinkyouaremagazine.com/tutorials/miscellaneous/ancestors-lunatic-asylums>. Accessed 4 October 2017.

"England & Wales, Crime, Prisons & Punishment, 1770-1935," findmypast.com.

<https://search.findmypast.com/search-world-Records/england-and-wales-crime-prisons-and-punishment-1770-1935>. Accessed 4 October 2017.

"England & Wales, Criminal Registers, 1791-1892." Ancestry.com.

<http://search.ancestryinstitution.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=1590>. Accessed 4 October 2017.

Gardiner, Tom. *Broomstick Over Essex and East Anglia: An Introduction to Witchcraft in the Eastern Counties During the Seventeenth Century*. Romford, England: Ian Henry, 1981.

Henry, Bryan. *Dublin Hanged: Crime, Law Enforcement and Punishment in late Eighteenth-Century Dublin*. Dublin, Ireland: Irish Academic Press, 1994.

Larner, Christina. "Witch beliefs and Accusations in England and Scotland." *History Today* 31 (1981): 32-36.

Mayhew, Henry. *The London Underworld in the Victorian Period*. Minealoe, New York: Dover Publications, 2005.

Peel, Edgar. *The Trials of the Lancashire Witches: A Study of Seventeenth-Century Witchcraft*. 3rd ed. Nelson, ENG: Hendon, 1985.

"Scotland, Names of Witches, 1658." Ancestry.com.
<http://search.ancestryinstitution.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=61099>. Accessed: 4 October 2017.

Seymour, St. John D. *Irish Witchcraft and Demonology*. Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, 1913.
Reprint, New York: Barnes and Noble, 1996.

Stretch, Euan. "Details of 840,000 lunatic asylum patients published online for the first time." *The Mirror*. 27 November 2014. <http://www.mirror.co.uk/uk-news/details-840000-lunatic-asylum-patients-4702979>. Accessed 4 October 2017.

"Survey of Scottish Witchcraft Database." Scottish History , School of History and Classics. Edinburgh: The University of Edinburgh, 2017.
<http://witches.shca.ed.ac.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=home.main> Accessed: 4 October 2017.

#FHLWebinars
#FamilyHistoryLibrary